



Press Clipping Article

Title: Week's recent rain helps corn farmers, but only in spots - Downpours a godsend for area farmers hoping to see big yields from fields.

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Scattered rain during this past week nourished some corn growers' hopes of big yields this fall, but failed to wash away the potential of a shriveled harvest on many farms.

Location was the key factor in calculating the rains' benefit after "pop-up" summer showers treated nearly every western Kentucky county differently in the last seven days. Some farms benefited from the rainfall, while others stayed bone dry.

Friday's showers illustrated the "pop-up" patterns — between 0.61 and 3 inches were dumped in different areas of McCracken County, according to Deanna Lindstrom, hydrometeorological technician with the National Weather Service in Paducah.

The timing of Friday's rain was perfect for farmers — as corn is pollinating.

"Friday made a 15- to 20-bushel-an-acre increase in yields. We call that 'a million-dollar rain,'" said Doug Wilson, McCracken County agriculture extension agent.

Wilson then corrected himself after a brief calculation. With corn fetching between \$3.60 and \$3.75 a bushel, the showers may have increased county yields by \$1.25 million to \$1.5 million. McCracken soybean farmers may see yield increases valued up to \$2.75 million, he said.

"I noticed the corn (Saturday) morning coming into the county fair, and it looks great. The soybeans have really popped from this. Friday helped turn things around. It's helped everything," Wilson said.

Marshall and Calloway counties haven't been as fortunate, where many farmers were distressed over the dryness. Low corn yields were likely in both counties, according to Marshall County agriculture extension agent Lincoln Martin.

Martin said that 1 inch fell on Friday at his house, halfway between Benton and Symsonia,

while 0.1 inch was collected at his Benton office and no accumulation was reported in Aurora near Kentucky Lake.

“The showers vary that much so it depends on where you are. Friday’s rain helps, but it does not change our drought status,” Martin said.

Ballard County still has the potential for a bumper crop after being drenched from early June storms that bypassed most of the region, Ballard agriculture extension agent Tom Miller said. Approximately 80 percent of the crop was in good shape.

“We have the potential for 150 to 170 bushels of corn an acre. That’s slightly above normal, although it’s really hard to say what normal is,” Miller said. “For those farmers who planted early, it’s been raining when the corn is pollinating. We’re in really good shape here, but 30 miles away, it may be something completely different.”

Ballard wheat yields were slightly below normal but much better than expected, Miller said.

Yield forecasts were still being debated in Hickman County, where extension agent Darian Irvan said rain was needed this week while corn pollinates.

More precipitation likely will come. Rain was in the forecast for Thursday and Friday, with a slight chance showers late Wednesday, meteorologist Jim Packett said.

A crucial time

Farmers endure the region’s weather whims — particularly the spotty rainfall — every growing season. Before Friday, the patterns of moisture and dryness were evident along farmer Dewain Gipson’s 1,000 acres of corn in the St. John area in McCracken County and into Graves County.

“All the fields got drenched (on Friday). It was pretty much an ideal rain. We’ll definitely make a corn crop now,” Gipson said. “We still need a few more rains to put us above average. Crops take up a lot of moisture, and a few more rains would be great.”

An average crop is between 140 and 150 bushels an acre, Gipson said.

Friday’s rain averaged about 1.5 inches on Gipson’s sprawling acreage, with 1.5 inches collected at his St. John home and 3 inches in a corn field along Oaks Road.

J.W. Goodwin, who farms in the St. John community as well as in Livingston County, said the next week will be a crucial time for rain while much of the region’s corn crop is in the pollinating, or tasseling, stage. Goodwin raises about 2,000 acres of corn.

“In Boaz bottom, we’ve had quite a bit of rain,” Goodwin said. “Depending on what happens in the next 10 days, we could still make a decent corn crop.”

Rainfall for June was 0.74 of an inch below normal on Saturday morning. Friday’s showers brought relief, but many areas had considerable run-off because the rain fell too fast to absorb into the soil, Lindstrom said. Most of the 3-inch accumulation at the weather service office at Barkley Regional Airport came in one hour.

“We’re still in a drought. The band of rain we saw (Friday) was in a fine area,” Lindstrom said. “Not everyone saw 3 inches. High amounts of rain fell through Ballard County into Kevil, western McCracken County, Paducah and Massac County, but totals dropped off to the south.”

Evaporation factor

Martin was quick to point out that 0.3 of an inch of moisture evaporates daily, so the benefits of many rainfalls can be short-lived during summer’s heat. Approximately 0.7 of an inch fell Tuesday, but nearly half of that moisture was lost by the end of the day, he said.

“When there is a 30 percent chance of rain, there also is a 70 percent chance that it won’t rain while moisture will still be lost into the atmosphere,” Martin said.

The rain gave a good start to the soybean crop planted in wheat residue, but it may not be enough to save much of the county’s corn crop, he said.

Wheat yields were severely impacted by the arid conditions, with some farmers getting 5 to 10 bushels an acre when they normally see 40 to 45, Martin said.

Marshall County cattle farmers also were scrambling. Hay yields were one-third of what farmers expected and ponds are drying up, giving the herds little to eat and drink, Martin said. In 90-degree weather, one 1,600-pound bull needs more than 20 gallons of water daily, he said.

“One farmer said he looked across his pasture and it looked like August and it’s only June,” Martin said last week. “I talked with one farmer who is selling half of his beef cattle. Another farmer is selling all his cattle simply because there is no pasture. Anyone with grazing animals — goats, sheep, horses — is having problems.

“The hay is scarce and the quality is not good. You’ve got to have something for them to eat. The hit-and-miss rains aren’t abnormal. We’ll take whatever rain comes our way, but the recent damp days haven’t changed our drought status.”

Friday’s rain by the numbers

Co-op observers for the National Weather Service at Barkley Regional Airport in Paducah reported a variety of Friday rain accumulations.

Kentucky

Barkley Dam 1 inch

Cadiz 0.25 inches

Canton 1.42 inches

Kenlake State Park 1.35 inches

Lone Oak . 0.61 inches

Mayfield 0.85 inches

National Weather Service office 3 inches

New Concord 2.28 inches

Paducah 2.65 inches

Smithland 2.16 inches

Illinois

Carbondale no rain

Cairo 0.39 inches

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